

Courts Sort Out Rash of Assaults on Children

Published in the Herald-Republic on Wednesday, October 4, 2000



SANDY SUMMERS/Yakima Herald-Republic

A tearful Roxanne Dunn hears charges of first-degree assault of a child in the case of her son, 2-year-old Gage Kelso, in the Yakima County Jail on Monday.

By JULIE PETERSON

YAKIMA HERALD-REPUBLIC

The bodies of two young boys were released for burial Tuesday and a third was discharged from a hospital, while authorities meanwhile continued unraveling the three unrelated cases of abuse.

"It's a tragedy for the whole community," said Alfonso Garcia, regional administrator for the Division of Children and Family Services for the state Department of Social and Health Services. "It's a rare situation and a sad week."

Details continued to emerge Tuesday.

Yakima County Sheriff's deputies arrested one of two people wanted for questioning in Friday's death of 13-month-old Mac Miller of

Toppenish, who was initially believed to have drowned. But an autopsy showed he suffered a number of injuries.

In a second case, assault charges were filed against the mother of Gage Kelso, a 2-year-old who was severely beaten the day before. He was released from a hospital Tuesday and placed in foster care with his brother.

In a third case, the mother of 10-month-old Christian Gonzales, who died Thursday, was ordered held as a material witness on Tuesday. Police continued looking for her boyfriend for questioning.

All three cases, while unrelated, occurred within 36 hours of each other.

Gage's mother, 27-year-old Roxanne Dunn of Yakima, was charged with first-degree assault of a child and remained in Yakima County Jail on \$100,000 bond.

CPS said it had twice in the last two months looked into allegations of abuse of Gage and was preparing a parental assessment report when the beating occurred.

According to the boy's grandmother, Lucinda Lipinski, Gage's father was making preparations to take custody of him and his brother.

She expressed anger that calls to CPS went unheeded until recently.

"We've turned her in several times for burns, bruises and marks in the past eight months," Lipinski said Tuesday. "I don't understand where CPS is coming from."

Reached late Tuesday, DSHS spokeswoman Kathy Spears in Olympia could not immediately comment further on the case but acknowledged that the two boys were in state custody, and that the two calls of allegations had been looked into by CPS.

CPS has also taken custody of a brother and sister of Mac Miller, a 13-month-old boy who initially was thought to have drowned in Toppenish Friday morning.

He was flown to Seattle's Harborview Medical Center, where it was discovered that he suffered a number of injuries, police said.

An autopsy's preliminary results showed Mac suffered a blunt-force injury to the head, but the death has not been confirmed as a homicide, said Lt. Dan Garcia of the Yakima County Sheriff's office.

A final report from King County Medical Examiner was expected today or Thursday.

Sheriff's deputies were searching for Mac's grandmother, a 42-year-old from Toppenish, who still hadn't contacted police late Tuesday. Her 39-year-old boyfriend was arrested Tuesday and was interviewed.

"She is supposedly in Toppenish, but she's disappeared," Dan Garcia said. "So we're still looking."

If she doesn't turn up Tuesday night, Dan Garcia said he would ask the prosecutor's office to issue a warrant for her arrest.

Mac's body was released to family Tuesday, and he was to be flown to his parents in Montana for burial.

The body of the other boy who died, 10-month-old Christian Gonzales, was also released to relatives Tuesday, and he will be taken to Montana for burial as well.

Christian had apparently been severely beaten Thursday and was not breathing when the ambulance arrived at his home on Eighth Street in Yakima.

Christian's mother remained at Yakima County's Juvenile Justice Center, while prosecutors wait for additional information before deciding whether to charge her in the child's death.

The 16-year-old girl was living with her 20-year-old boyfriend at the time the baby died. The man, who is not the baby's father, came to the hospital Thursday but left before police could question him.

The Yakima County Coroner's office has not released a final report on the cause of death, but prosecutors said Christian suffered bruises, bite marks, and was apparently asphyxiated.

Because they are still looking for her boyfriend and more evidence is coming in, prosecutors asked Judge Heather Van Nuys to hold the 16-year-old as a material witness, because they weren't prepared to file murder charges while evidence was still being gathered.

The girl, whose parents live out of town, had few ties to the community and was implicating her boyfriend in the death of Christian, Brusic said.

Van Nuys agreed that the girl will be held until a court hearing Tuesday, when police hope to have found the boyfriend and the final results of the autopsy are available.

The girl's mother, with whom she had lived most of the time since her parents' divorce nine years ago, had just left town two weeks ago to take care of her ailing mother in Montana when this happened, said the girl's father, Tony Chavez of Seattle.

"Hopefully they'll find him (the boyfriend) and clear this thing up," Chavez said. "She's real scared right now."